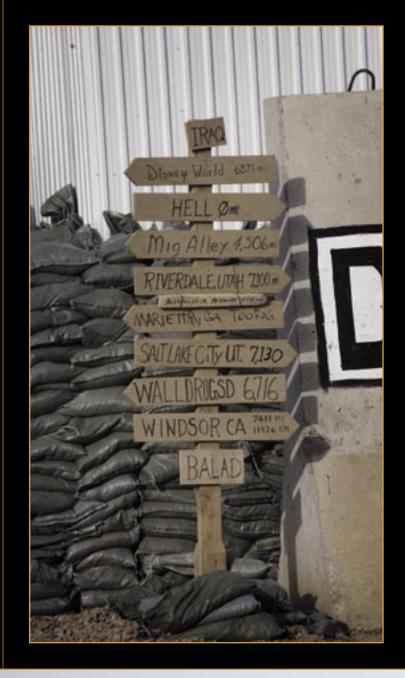
## Heat and choking dust. Long hours and family separation. Mortar attacks and the stress of war. These are just a part of life for Airmen at Balad Air Base, Iraq. story and photos by Tech. Sgt. Mike Buytas Life there is not easy to say the least. So when they get the downtime, Airmen find — sometimes make up — things to take the edge off the routine. To chill out. Or to reflect on the important job they are doing in the global war on terrorism and keeping Iraq free. Reading or working out is big in the tent city the troops call home. So is basketball, and sending e-mails to loved ones. Some troops catch a ballgame or movie on television. Of course there are the card games and shooting pool — or the breeze. Some gather to put on an impromptu guitar concert, even taking requests. And there are some who just prefer to pick a quiet, shady spot to grab a break, or a snooze. Airmen will find something to do when they're off duty. Because with each passing hour, they're that much closer to joining the loved ones they left at home. Any quiet moment is golden at Balad Air Base, Iraq. This Airman reads a newspaper to catch up on current events back home. **28** Airman **3** July 2005 Airman **3** July 2005 **29**







Airmen that they've come from every corner of the globe to keep Iraq free. While waiting to go outside the wire on a combat patrol, Airmen (above) find time to strike up an impromptu game of hacky sack. Not graffiti, but unit markings (left) adorn the T-barriers that protect one of the base's dining facilities.

**30** Airman **♦** July 2005 Airman **3** July 2005 **31** 



**32** Airman ♥ July 2005 Airman ♥ July 2005